

SFPD Response to Bay Guardian Article on Sit/Lie Law



Message From The Office of the Chief Of Police



Dear Mr. Redmond,

I feel compelled to respond to your recent editorial on the proposed "sit-lie" ordinance currently under discussion in our City. I am somewhat surprised that you have dismissed out-of-hand one modest, and cost effective, approach to dealing with the increasing thuggery seen on some streets in San Francisco.

The San Francisco Police Department (SFPD), like most police agencies, faces a multiplicity of challenges, continually reassessing where and how scarce resources are to be allocated. Any reasonably attentive person knows that the current economic environment is placing unparalleled strains on local coffers. I am a realist and know that the SFPD will be expected to do more with less, much as other city agencies will. We will be expected to continue to deal with the deeply troubling and totally unacceptable situation prevailing in some of our neighborhoods, where street thugs take over public spaces with impunity.

I cannot in good faith as Chief stand by idly and assert that the only answer to this problem is an around-the-clock beat officer presence that is, quite frankly, not possible given the competing demands for officers. In light of this, I have a pressing obligation to look for creative solutions that pass constitutional muster, have been shown to be effective, and most importantly, strengthen the relationships we have worked hard to establish with the city's various communities.

As I have publicly stated, a well crafted "sit-lie" ordinance would provide police officers with a valuable tool to deal with this problem in an effective, sustainable, and smart manner.

Given the SFPD's current resources and the further reductions we know will occur due to unalleviated attrition and anticipated funding shortages, the Department will be unable to sustain the enforcement posture required to deal with the thugs who have overrun the Haight-Ashbury, and other City neighborhoods. A "sit-lie" ordinance would go a long way in helping to remedy this situation.

I welcome vigorous discourse on this issue, but this is surely not the time engage in ideological warfare which militates against the development of thoughtful solutions to very real problems.

Simply put, I must reiterate that the SFPD does not have the resources necessary to deploy foot beat officers in every community that needs them. Therefore, constitutionally sound solutions that can assist the police to help neighborhoods deal with street hooliganism shouldn't be dismissed based on some ill conceived notion of personal freedom. Bullying and intimidating innocent passers-by and local merchants cannot and will not be tolerated: period. No one should be allowed to invade public spaces wantonly without regard for the rights of others, and then attempt to hide behind a non-existent constitutional protection.

Unfortunately, that's exactly what is taking place in many of our neighborhoods today, where groups of street thugs take over public spaces intimidating entire communities, often hurting local businesses and occasionally assaulting and physically injuring people. A narrowly crafted "sit-lie" ordinance would provide a tool for the police to quickly and effectively prevent these situations from escalating to the levels they have around the Haight-Ashbury.

It is unfortunate that the Bay Guardian has taken the position expressed in your current editorial. I look forward to a thorough public exploration of these issues. I believe the majority of the people of San Francisco are no longer willing to quietly surrender their neighborhoods to street hooliganism. However, to correct the situation we must be willing to work together for the betterment of our communities, looking at solutions that may not have been implemented here before but are surely worthy of our thoughtful consideration.

I look forward to working with you, the SF Bay Guardian, the ACLU, and other responsible community stake holders in developing reasonable and sustainable solutions to this problem. Our jewel of a City of deserves no less. I am committed to working collaboratively to bring practical and tested solutions to the table.

George Gascón

Chief of Police

San Francisco Police Department

<http://www.sf-police.org/index.aspx?page=3278>